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FOR PARIS AND LONDON AFRICA WATCHERS

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SUBJECT: ESCALATING TENSIONS AS A CONFIDENT DEBY ATTACKS
SUDAN-CHAD BORDER

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY DCM LUCY TAMLYN FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 5, Chadian President Deby delivered a blunt and confrontational speech to a pro-government rally accusing Sudan of trying to destabilize Chad by backing Chad's rebel groups. Meanwhile, news media reported on January 7 that Chadian forces bombed rebel bases along the Darfur-Chad border. Deby's confident speech, and the aggressive air raids, seems to indicate that Deby is ready to commit to pursuing a military strategy to deal with the armed Chadian opposition -- even if that means antagonizing and escalating tensions with the Government of Sudan. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Repeating an assertion he has made before, President Deby stated at a January 5 pro-government rally that the unwillingness of the Sudanese government to end the support for Chadian rebels is destabilizing Chad and will not be tolerated. Deby stated that the continued support by Sudan of "mercenaries" is affecting the security and stability of Chad. In front of a crowd of approximately 1,500 supporters, Deby went on to say that "no mercenaries will be allowed to circulate in Chad" and that Chad "will destroy them (the rebels/mercenaries) in their rear bases." (Note: Deby likely was defining rear base as the use of Sudanese territory by Chadian rebels as a place for resupply, rest and recuperation. End Note) When queried directly by a rally participant if he plans to cut diplomatic ties with Sudan, Deby replied "allow me to consult with the government and in some days, I will give you my final response." The January 7 diatribe against Sudan followed President Deby's New Year's address (broadcast on national radio) which condemned the "repression, terror, and barbarism" by the Khartoum regime and accused President Bashir of seeking to destroy Chad.

¶3. (SBU) Meanwhile, on January 5 and 7, Chadian airplanes bombed rebel bases near the West Darfur capital, Geneina, killing upwards of nine rebels. Alwihda website reported that armed rebellion commander Colonel Fizani Mahadjir was the target of the air raids and two of his close bodyguards died in the attack. This reportedly resulted in head of Sudanese forces Bashir threatening to retaliate if the bombings continue. In an interview with Radio France International (RFI), the GOC spokesman said that although Chad does not want a war with Sudan, Chad has the right to go after areas where Chadian rebels movements have been allowed to operate freely. Hoping to mitigate the tense atmosphere, Libya has sent a message to both President Bashir and President Deby asking them to play down confrontations, according to local internet daily Chadactuel. In addition, the Security Council and AU have called for both parties to ramp down tensions.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Deby's aggressive stance with the Chadian armed opposition seems to indicate that he feels confident enough to go on the offensive against the Chadian rebels, even if that means crossing the Chad-Sudanese border. He may hope that, by attacking now before the arrival of the EUFOR/MINURCAT force, he can neutralize the armed opposition and avoid Sudanese retaliation. Nevertheless, by baiting Sudan, he risks all out war with Khartoum and jeopardizes his claim that Chad is a victim of Sudan's aggressive behavior.

¶5. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
NIGRO